
2007

Community Snapshot: Pilsen Alliance

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COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT



HISTORY

In 1998, as the result of the first Pilsen Community Congress in 1998, community residents and businesses formed a not-for-profit grassroots community organization known as Pilsen Alliance. Today, Pilsen Alliance continues fighting for Social Justice, facilitating the leadership capacity of its residents and organizing to ensure that the community does not become displaced and that their interests are served.

Pilsen is located west of downtown Chicago at the junction of several major roadways. Pilsen has long been a thriving working-class immigrant community that today boasts a strong base of businesses, restaurants, churches and cultural centers. Many local leaders are concerned that surrounding high-end development will result in the loss of jobs, affordable housing and displace existing residents and businesses due to increasing real estate prices, rents and property taxes. Pilsen Alliance has won substantial victories in the neighborhoods of Pilsen, Marshall Square, Little Village, North Lawndale and Cicero.

MISSION

Our mission is to improve the quality of life and preserve the rich, working-class, immigrant, predominately Mexican community of Pilsen by supporting local leadership at the grassroots level and creating advocacy/organizing campaigns that promote self-determination, accountability and inclusiveness.

PROGRAMS

Whittier Parent Leadership Project: Parent group created in February of 2003, with over (30) active parents. The Parent Committee, *Lideres de Whittier Buscando Respuestas y No Evasivas* (Whittier Leaders looking for Answers Not Evasiveness) is currently leading a community campaign to acquire a vacated former police district headquarters that sits adjacent to Whittier School for a much-needed school expansion of its current 100-year old K-6 Elementary School plant. Pilsen Alliance provides leadership development to support parent-based decision-making and neighborhood self-determination via leadership and resource workshops, presentations and community organizing.

Community School Partnership, citing the significant parent involvement created through the *Lideres* Parent Committee, Pilsen Alliance was invited and selected as Whittier's official non-profit partner in its "Community School" designation and funding. Pilsen Alliance and Whittier School provide and coordinate culturally competent and academically challenging school programs for Whittier's students and families including, Tutoring, Martial Arts, Youth Violin, Children's Choir, Adult ESD, GED and Computer courses.

Pilsen is Not for Sale Campaign: Campaign comprised of Pilsen stakeholders, long-time homeowners and renters to combat displacement and gentrification pressures and demand community input in development decisions. The Campaign successfully passed two Public Advisory Referenda in March of 2004 and 2006, receiving 95% and 76% respectively.

Pilsen Alliance

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Securing the restoration of weekend train service along the Douglas branch of the Chicago Transit Authority's Blue Line. After a seven-year battle against transit racism, the Pilsen Alliance, lead agency of the Blue Line Transit Taskforce compelled the Chicago Transit Authority to begin offering weekend service on the Cermak/Douglas branch of Blue Line on January 1, 2005.

Passing a local referendum in Chicago's 25th Ward in March 2004 that called on the local alderman to hold open, community hearings on all zoning changes. Intended to provide the community with a means of voicing their concerns over the growing number of high-end loft and condo conversions, the referendum passed with 95% of the votes cast in the election—99% in some precincts.

Establishing the first Pilsen Community Zoning Board. In November of 2004, the Pilsen Alliance in accord with the Alderman's office created the first-ever Pilsen Community Zoning Board. Unfortunately, in the Spring of 2005, Alderman Daniel Solis decided to no longer work with the PCZB after he was publicly challenged by local residents at the first community public hearing sponsored through his office and the PCZB. The Pilsen Is Not For Sale Committee of the Pilsen Alliance continues the work that began at the Pilsen Community Zoning Board.

Winning state expedited lead and asbestos abatement at Whittier Elementary School. After several public actions in the Summer of 2004, in *Lideres* pressured the Chicago Public School and Alderman Solis to abate these health risks from Whittier School.

Designating Whittier Elementary School as a Community School. Citing the significant parent involvement created through *Lideres* and our partnerships success in obtaining Campaign to Expand Community Schools funding, Chicago Public Schools invited the Pilsen Alliance and Whittier School to join its 2004 Community Schools cohort, expanding the funding base for this new partnership, allowing for innovative, academic and culturally appropriate programming for

Whittier's school children and parents.

Passing a local referendum in Chicago's 25th Ward in March 2006 that called on the local alderman and the Chicago City Council to down-zone residential portions of Pilsen from an RT-4 to RS-3 to slow down gentrification. Intended as a community strategy to; preserve existing scale and affordable housing, limited potential for condo conversions and increased community notification and input if changes are sought. The referendum passed with 76% of the votes cast in the election.

Preserving our Future.

